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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KTIP](#) [KCRM](#) [HSTC](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S NEW ANTI-TIP NGO COMMITTEE

REF: A. A) YEREVAN 1091
 B. B) YEREVAN 1101

Classified By: Acting DCM Robin Phillips for Reason 1.4b.

SUMMARY

11. (C) On August 21, the Prosecutor General (PG) announced the formation of an NGO committee to assist it in its anti-TIP efforts. Anti-TIP NGO leaders generally feel the creation of such a team is a good idea, as long as it is allowed to function fully and does not become a tool for the PG to continue business as usual while appearing to bow to the will of the international community. With the investigation into alleged witness intimidation by prosecutors (Ref A) yet to begin, it remains to be seen what difference this committee might make with regard to TIP prosecution in Armenia. END SUMMARY.

ANTI-TIP NGO COMMITTEE TO HELP PG

12. (C) On August 23, PG Aghvan Hovsepyan called Ambassador to describe the workings of the NGO committee the creation which had been announced two days earlier. He said the committee would increase the transparency of the PG's anti-TIP activities, ensure public supervision over the PG's efforts to reveal cases of human exploitation, and protect victims' rights. The committee, scheduled to begin operating August 28 with five to seven NGO members, will have access to criminal cases in progress and will be present at victims' interrogations with their consent. NGOs involved must have at least three years of experience in anti-TIP work.

13. (C) Recruitment for the committee's membership has been active. According to anti-TIP NGO Hope and Help Director Yenok Shatvoryan, PG Hovsepyan personally offered Shatvoryan a spot on the committee shortly after tax inspectors had visited Hope and Help's offices (Ref B). Shatvoryan claims he took the offer to avoid further unwarranted scrutiny (by the tax service) of his organization. Shatvoryan believes, however, that if well implemented, this NGO group could turn into a very good mechanism for comprehensively combating TIP in Armenia.

14. (C) Reaction to the new NGO committee has been mixed. According to the President of the Association of Investigative Journalists NGO, Edik Baghdasaryan, PG spokesperson Sona Truzyan asked for his assistance in choosing the future committee members. Baghdasaryan sees this initiative as at least a good source of information, and has accepted the offer to cooperate. Assessing his boss' new initiative, however, Senior Anti-TIP Unit

Prosecutor Armen Boshnaghyan (please protect) was extremely negative about the new initiative, calling it unserious, buffoonery and a ruse to disguise the PG's "true" intentions.

TIP PROSECUTOR INVESTIGATION?

15. (C) As reported in reftels, the progress of the investigation into the conduct of TIP prosecutors still remains unclear. Baghdasaryan, whose organization made the first public allegations against Prosecutor Yeremyan for his mistreatment of trafficking victims (Ref A), knows nothing about the investigation against Yeremyan or the events that triggered the creation of the new NGO committee, but is convinced that the two are related. He noted that potential committee members have been told they will have direct participation in the investigation of allegations against Qcrupulous prosecutors.

16. (C) Senior Anti-TIP Unit Prosecutor Armen Boshnaghyan was more cynical. When asked for his views on the allegations against Yeremyan and others, Boshnaghyan said he was convinced that the PG office would take measures -- either through threats, bribes or "convincing" -- against the victims who presented the allegations, to keep them quiet. In an earlier conversation on August 14, Boshnaghyan predicted that this investigation of the allegations would amount to nothing. He also noted it would be difficult for Hope and Help Director Shatvoryan to be involved in the internal investigation into Yeremyan's activities, because Shatvoryan would have conflicting status as both a witness and an investigator.

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HOPE AND HELP - ACTING MORE CAUTIOUS

17. (C) Boshnaghyan considered it possible that PG Hovsepyan asked tax insQtors to audit Hope and Help, as a means to put pressure on the NGO (Ref B). When he met with Poloff August 15, the Hope and Help director was perceptibly agitated and nervous, as he cautiously communicated the mere facts about the PG's idea of creating the NGO committee. Shatvoryan, visibly afraid that his office may be under surveillance, assured Poloff they would have a more open conversation once things become less heated. Shatvoryan brushed off concerns that his NGO's close association with the PG's office could tarnish its reputation and turn victims away. He noted the NGO has always cooperated with law enforcement, and that its main goal, to have traffickers punished, remains the same.

COMMENT

18. (C) The NGOs involved are aware that they might be able to use an NGO monitoring group to their advantage; the inclusion of reputable organizations in this committee may per se give the organization teeth. While on its face the idea of an NGO committee assisting the PG in TIP investigations is a welcome step in achieving better governmental action against trafficking, the fact remains that with more than two weeks having passed since the Ambassador raised the allegations of prosecutorial misconduct, the PG has yet to take any measure (even temporary suspension of the accused) to address this issue. To the contrary, the Prosecutor General seems to have put significant -- and seemingly undue -- pressure on anti-TIP NGO Hope and Help.

EVANS